

The Republican.

No. 26, Vol. 7.] LONDON, Friday, June 27, 1823. [PRICE 6d.

TO THE CHRISTIAN JUDGE BAILEY.

LETTER XIX.

Dorchester Gaol, June 15, Year 1823

CHRISTIAN,

of the last of the Gods.

I PASS on to the collect for Ascension day, as I find nothing intervening worthy of notice; nor should I have stopped here, had I not lately met with an excellent exposition of the subject, or doctrine of the ascension, of Jesus Christ in a manuscript sent me from Aberdeen. I wanted nothing to persuade me that the whole subject was a fable; but I had not discovered that a direct proof of its being fabulous was to be found in the New Testament itself!

The Ascension day is stated to have been the day on which Jesus ascended into heaven. We will not now enquire any thing about heaven, nor towards what sign of the Zodiac it points; but we will look into the New Testament, into *that excellent book!* for instruction upon the subject of this ascension. A great deal has been said in defence of Christianity, on the ground, that the accounts of Jesus Christ, which we have in the New Testament, were in part written by those who were eye witnesses of his whole public life. Though there is not the slightest proof to be had that such is the case, we will grant the admission for once, and try the subject upon that ground. The only thing really supernatural, related of Jesus, in the New Testament, is his visible ascension from the earth, without the aid of physical means: all his pretended miracles, and even his restoration to life, may be accounted for upon physical grounds, as far as they are worth an examination; but a rising in the atmosphere without physical aid is a matter of curiosity: all his other actions may be construed into trick and imposition upon ignorant people; this could not deceive them, if true, and done in open day. Now, the fact is, that the alleged writers in the New Testament, who are stated

to have been the immediate disciples of Jesus, make not the slightest allusion to this ascension! When I first read the objection in the aforementioned manuscript, I could not persuade myself that I was correct; therefore, I searched these said *holy scriptures*, and all doubts were removed. I found the assertion to be strictly true, that not one of these pretended eye witnesses of this ascension make the slightest mention, or even allusion to the circumstance! Neither the gospels of Matthew or John, nor the epistles of James, Peter, John, or Jude make the least mention of any thing of the kind! What will the Freethinking and Unitarian Christians say to this? They reject all the other pretended miracles and profess to stand alone upon that of the resurrection and ascension!

The doctrine of the resurrection, without the ascension, is nothing at all; for nailing to the cross, though a horrible punishment, does not affect the vital parts; and men have been known to hang on the cross *alive* for many days, or until they were actually starved to death. This said New Testament does not shew that Jesus was suspended a single day; and even an animation was suspended under such a punishment, nothing is more probable than its restoration. The manuscript, to which I have alluded, treats this subject so fully, so effectually, and in so admirable a manner that I shall do all I can to urge its appearance in print.

Now, to say that this omission of the notice of the ascension is an oversight on the part of all these alleged eye witnesses, is a sort of testimony that will suit no honest man: it is the very pith and pivot of the whole doctrine of Christianity. If those eye witnesses did not put it upon paper, what proof have we that they communicated the matter to those who did? Had such a communication taken place, would not the defect in the gospels have been pointed out and the account added? Could this main feature of Christianity have been overlooked by any one reader, had the story been as common then as now among Christians? This is the completest stab that this mythology has yet received! I have long been without a doubt of the fabulous nature of the tale about Jesus; and who can be without doubt now, after he reads this exposition and refers to the New Testament for the truth? Let any one ask himself this one question: "If none of the alleged eye witnesses of this superhuman ascension of Jesus have put the matter upon record, what pretence to truth can the tale have from those who were avowedly not eye witnesses?"

It is astonishing, that the matter here treated of, should have

escaped the searching eyes of so many Anti-Christians! Though I have seen allusions to the subject in two former works of my own publication: "Israel Vindicated" and "The Critical Remarks" of my Edinburgh friend, its importance was not unfolded to my mind until I read the Aberdeen manuscript. Mr. Paine, in his second part of the "Age of Reason," has noticed the omission of all allusion to the ascension in the gospels of Matthew and John; but the fact did not strike upon his mind, that they were the proper persons to have noticed the circumstances, rather than Mark or Luke! I have now carefully examined all the epistles of the alleged first disciples of *Jesus*, and I cannot find the least allusion to the ascension! Here is new work cut out for all the writers of evidences of Christianity! I must send you a private letter upon this subject, Mr. Judge Bailey!

My Aberdeen friend has called his work "The New Trial of the Witnesses." He begins with an allusion to Sherlock's "Trial of the Witnesses," in answer to "Woolstons Discourse upon the Miracles;" and after pointing out sufficient flaws to invalidate the evidence, he orders a *New Trial*, and and brings forward new evidence like a most masterly lawyer! I am inclined to believe, that every reader will act the part of a Juryman and pronounce a verdict of "*Fable and Fraud*" upon the Christian religion! The most confiding Christian will not feel a prejudice wounded; but will be involuntarily led to proclaim his new conviction. From the title and beginning of the work, I entered into it with prejudice; but I soon found it changed to delight.

The next Christian subject for discussion is Whitsunday, or the Pentecost. Whitsunday, is an old Saxon holiday, and is now known in many parts of the country, under the term *Whittentide* and *Whitsuntide*. It was the time among the Saxons, between seed time and harvest, at which they used to assemble, to elect their annual legislators, or the Wittenagemote, their assembly of wise men: the time when annual parliaments, universal suffrage and good laws were the prevailing fashion.

Pentecost is a Jewish festival, and all the pretended anniversaries of the birth, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, are mere tricks of the early Christians to afford the giddy multitude a substitute for the loss of their pagan holidays! Nothing pleases an ignorant multitude so much as fairs, wakes, and festivals: and nothing can be a greater proof of their ignorance and slavery than that they should be tickled with the very means that are used to

keep them poor, or to drain off periodically what little sums of money they can periodically accumulate! With a discreet population, every day would be a holiday, or a day of pleasure. A certain number of hours would be devoted to industry, to recreation, and to rest. Men would never make themselves perfect slaves by an excess of labour on one day, that they might accumulate the means to make themselves dirty beasts on the next; as I have seen to be the weekly practice of hundreds of my fellow workmen: working hard *without food* on two or three days in the week, and eating and drinking hard *without work* on the others; always determined never to work with the price of a loaf in their pockets! Such people always become eventually the most miserable animals on the face of the earth! I see by the papers, that the Coroner for Manchester has lately held inquests on nine persons, five men and four women, who have destroyed themselves by drunkenness! What a shocking reflection! It is absolutely worse than the Manchester Massacre! And the persons who will thus tax their own industry have no ground or right to complain of any other taxation. All other tyranny is trifling compared with that which they suffer from their own bad passions.

The Christian festival of Whitsuntide is meant to be the anniversary of the day, on which, it is said, the Holy Ghost came upon the twelve apostles in the shape of tongues of fire! After which they were enabled to speak all languages and to perform all miracles; except that of saving themselves from getting flogged for their tricks! As soon as any magistrate attempted to punish them, the Holy Ghost fled and their power of working miracles ceased!

The subject of which I mean to treat more particularly here, is the pretended miraculous power of speaking all languages, or such languages as they had not learnt by the common routine of conversation or education. I shall contend, that as language, is a property which no God can impart, as it is altogether a human production, depending upon human means, and only applicable to human ends; it follows, that this tale of the Holy Ghost, in the shape of fiery tongues falling upon the Christian apostles, is like every thing else, bearing the name of Christianity, a fable, a forgery, a lie, an imposition upon ignorance.

Human language consists of an uttering of sounds; and a reduction of those sounds to signs of making certain sounds the representatives of certain signs, and certain signs, the representatives of all the physical objects we see around us,

or know to exist. The power of language has even been carried further: sounds and signs have been created for imaginary existences, which can only be defined as false notions, nonentities, no realities. All these false notions have arisen from an ignorance of the cause of the physical effects by which we are affected. The difference, therefore, between knowledge and ignorance is, that the former defines a cleansing of human language from all improper signs and sounds, and getting the fullest acquaintance with all those physical objects which we know to exist, and which we represent by signs and sounds: not only to know the right sign and sound for the right object, but to analyze the object itself, and get an acquaintance with all its component parts and all their qualities. An accumulation of such acquisitions is an attainment of what we call knowledge: and *real knowledge* is a matter of slow acquirement, particularly, among a rude and ignorant people, for before you can begin to acquire an atom of sound knowledge, you must divest your mind of all those old associations of ideas, upon the particular the subject, which ignorance has implanted. The labour, then to get at pure knowledge, is so great, that but few men, even in this pretended age of literature and accomplishments, can be said to be men of sound and extensive knowledge! Perhaps, the successive improvements of future generations will show, that not a man of sound and extensive knowledge existed up to this time! How wicked, then all attempts to persecute for opinion's sake! How mad the endeavour to fix opinion to a standard! How base are that people who fear free discussion!

If you were to strip the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) of its moral sentiments; those sentiments which wholly relate to moral duties between man and man; it would be the most odiously ignorant book that ever was written by man; and the moral sentiments it contains were all borrowed from the much-abused Pagans or Gentiles. Morality is the same everywhere, and in every language: it changes not, and relates to objects which change not.

My object is to shew, that as human language, of any one particular kind, is a matter of slow acquirement, in which you must learn to imitate every sound singly, and to understand every sign by the same slow process; it is impossible, that these Christian apostles could have acquired this pretended instantaneous gift of tongues. I do not feel more certain of my own existence, than that there is no God, no spirit, no ghost, that knows

any thing of human language, human ideas, or human actions. As the signs and sounds upon which human language is formed have their foundation in the human organization, it is analogous, that a similar organisation is necessary to possess a knowledge of them: this no God, nor ghost, has in the present day. The singing of a nightingale, or the note of any other bird, is a matter quite as curious as human language: it has its foundation in the same principle. Why do not all birds sing alike? Because there is a difference in their organizations. The inference I mean to draw from this parallel is, that if there were Gods and ghosts to speak and to think like men, they may be supposed to be able to sing like all sorts of birds, and to squeak, squall, shriek, mew, roar, and grunt, like every other animal, which are all so many sorts of animal language! Let the reader reflect upon this subject and see where it will lead him. I quit it for the present, as it will not be politic for me to unfold too much of my inspiration at one time! I must feed my flock, Mr. Justice Bailey, as Paul fed his; some with milk and some with strong meats.

It may be well however to observe, that at the time in which Christianity originated, the whole of Europe, of Asia, and of Africa, could be viewed but as so many Roman Provinces; which must have led to so complete an intermixture of languages every where, at which the Roman troops, formed of all nations, were stationed, that a man of ordinary capacity could not fail to get a smattering knowledge of the whole. I was brought up in a town (Ashburton) which was a place of parole for prisoners of war. I have seen both French and Danish prisoners there; but having more knowledge of the latter, from a more advanced age, I can speak of the rapid manner in which the prisoners and the inhabitants understood each other; each getting a smattering knowledge of the other's language. Such must have been the case throughout the Roman Provinces.

RICHARD CARLILE.

TO MR. R. CARLILE, DORCHESTER GAOL.

SIR,

Royton, April 12, 1823.

OWING to accidental causes I did not receive your number of the 28 of March until yesterday; and I seize the first opportunity that presents itself to me of replying to your observations on my letter, bearing date January 21.

I mean to be as brief as possible, to say no more than is barely necessary to give you a distinct understanding of the opinions I have formed on your reply to me, and the reasons on which those opinions are founded.

It may not, however, be wholly uninteresting to you to be informed, that the trifling circumstance of moving a vote of thanks to you in the year 1819, arose entirely from a sense of your devotion to the cause of public liberty, and the services which, by your political exertions, you had rendered that cause. I saw you whilst thus engaged selected as a victim by a powerful band of men, whom I regarded as being more actuated by a wish to put down liberal political opinions, than by a desire to promote the cause of true religion and morality. Hence my sympathy for you, and hence my motion for the vote of thanks alluded to by you. So much much by way of explanation as to that circumstance, and now to the subject more particularly before us.

You say, that you are glad to have a reasoning opponent. I hope I shall always be found, if an opponent at all, a reasoning one; at least it shall not be my fault if I am not, since I will always endeavour so to be. Argument is the weapon to be wielded in all controversy, and not persecution; I detest a persecuting spirit whether manifested against you, or any man as much as you do yourself.

You say, that my reasoning has made no alteration in your sentiments: perhaps not. It does not, however, necessarily follow, that because it has failed to convince you, that it must be unfounded. If my reasoning has failed to convince you, I can very truly say, that your reasoning has failed to convince me, so far we are yet equal.

It would occupy too much time and space to go through a very minute investigation of your reply; which as it does not appear necessary I shall not do. But will content myself with attending to the main part of it.

You find fault with me for using the word "infidelity" as an adjunct to "Atheism;" and truly in the sense there used, I must confess it was a superfluous term, but that is all. It did not arise, as you appear to suppose, from having lent my ears to any senseless clamour; but as my letter was written hastily, it arose from the hurry in which I wrote, and the use of the word in that sense, does not, in my opinion, argue one tittle either for or against a man being a man of sense; nor should I have expected from you so much notice being taken of a merely superfluous word in a discussion on principles.

You are pleased, too, to find fault with my mode of asking questions. You say, they are vaguely expressed, and appear to think that they scarcely admit of a definite meaning being attached to them. You may think so, and you may be right in such opinion; you may also be wrong, and that I believe you are. I have examined the questions over again, and I must confess that I do not see any great impropriety either in the questions themselves, or in the mode in which they are put. I will be a little more explicit here: in order to be understood, it is necessary to use words that are understood, whether their classical and literal meaning be precisely such as their general meaning, or not. This rule I pretty uniformly adhered to in asking you the questions I did ask you; and I doubted not, but that a man of your penetration, would have instantly perceived this, and have reasoned accordingly. In this expectation I have been disappointed. You affect not to understand my questions; call them ridiculous and say that no philosopher would ask such questions. As far as the philosophy of the matter goes, in its learned sense, perhaps you are right. I set up no pretensions to philosophy in its learned sense. I affect to be nothing more than a plain man; I have no ambition to pass in the world for a great learned philosopher. As to the ridiculousness of the thing, there, however, I must contend that you are wrong. An important question can never be ridiculous, provided the plain import of the question be apparent, and that I still think, notwithstanding all that you say to the contrary, is the case with the questions I ask you. Let us take one as an example of the whole, to see whether I am right or not in this respect. I select that which appears to baulk you the most. It is this: "but allow me to ask you if, as you say, there is no Deity, how matter first came into life, or how it was first produced?" Now the plain import, the palpable meaning of this question is, merely, "if we deny the existence of a first cause, how are we to account for the production and animation (that part of it of course that is animated) of matter?" Had you asked me a similar question, I should at once have put this construction upon it, and neither have called it ridiculous, nor affected not to understand it. Your readers understand the question well enough, they have no idea of putting any other construction upon it, than this just stated.

I am sorry that you did not understand this question, because as far as the natural philosophy of the matter goes, this is the point on which the argument must turn. You do indeed reason somewhat upon it, as though you had understood it. Your reasoning, however, is to me completely a dead letter. You say, you are not called upon to prove how matter came into existence, but that it rests with me to shew that matter was ever out of existence. Here I differ with you completely, and for the following reason; you oppose yourself to the settled conviction of mankind, as to the creation of the world by a Deity. You say they are essentially wrong in this respect: now by all the rules of fair argument, if you deny the truth of a generally received opinion, you are bound to shew that opinion to be wrong:

upon this principle then, you are called upon to shew how the world could come into existence without the intervention of Deity; if you do that I will acknowledge you to be right and myself wrong: but until you do that, you do nothing effectual towards supporting the truth of your theory.

You accuse me of jumping over difficulties in ascribing the creation (so called) to Deity. But do I jump over as many difficulties as you do, in your denial of this proposition. I have reason and argument for all that I say on the subject, for every conclusion that I arrive at. As far as the evidence of my senses goes, I see distinctly no effect ever produced without a cause; by analogy therefore I am justified in supposing, that every effect is to be ascribed to some cause. The world is an effect, it must therefore have a cause; that cause *whatever it is* I call God; and this conclusion is not to be overthrown, because I cannot *physically* exhibit to you the existence of the Deity; nor because I cannot shew to you the state of things before the creation of the world. Such things are beyond the reach of human power, but human reason which plainly ascribes every effect to some cause, justifies a conviction in their existence. And I ask you, my good Sir, whether such a conviction is not much more rational than that you have come to, viz. that matter is the cause of all things itself without a cause. Now, if your opinion be correct, matter contains within itself a producing power; or, at least the assertion implies as much. I wish not to speak harshly, for I do not write angrily, but really I must say that such an assertion appears to me to contain within itself a gross contradiction in terms. You and I and every man at all versed in the science of chemistry know well that matter does not possess any such power. You know well the combined ingenuity of all the men of science on the face of the earth, nay of all mankind put together, could not by any possibility add one single grain to the quantity of matter already in existence. Every chemist knows this to be a fact, clearly established as his own existence; and thus this part of your theory (a most essential part it is) stands clearly disproved and that too by your favourite science—chemistry.

You insist upon it that all is matter. I need not say, because you know the fact before, that I differ with you here most completely. If all be matter, what are the physical materials of which the human mind is composed; I know well that you will not deny the existence of the human mind; and yet I think you will have great difficulty in demonstrating that it is composed of any species of physical materials whatever. In fact you know, that it has no physical composition whatever. How then will you get over this difficulty? You cannot, nor will not deny its existence as a human principle; you cannot prove it to have a material composition. Here then is a human principle not matter, controuling and directing the operations of matter. This I feel sure will not be disputed; and therefore may we not rationally conclude, that as we know there is a human principle not matter, capable of controuling the operations, that there is an almighty principle not matter, capable of creating matter. By a pa-

city of reason such a conclusion is perfectly rational, and when at the same time we cannot otherwise satisfactorily account for the phenomena we behold, this rational conclusion amounts in my mind at least to a positive conviction.

Such being the fact how will you keep your theory out of this difficulty? Will you say that the mind dies with the body, and that therefore the analogy will not hold good? If you do, I shall at once demonstrate the extreme improbability. I shall call upon you to prove it. I shall shew you that the mind is independent of the body; that it directs the operations of the body; that the mind may be very strong and the body very feeble, that it is not subject to the same general laws as the body, and that therefore the decay and natural death of the body may take place without it necessarily following that any such circumstance must happen to the mind. And if this is not deemed sufficient (which however with most men I think it will be) still you must admit as I have just said before, that the mind being in itself not matter, while it is in existence directs and controuls the actions of the body; and if this is the case on so narrow a scale, as the human mind directing the actions of the human body, may we not analogically conclude, that there is a great and almighty principle capable of directing and governing the whole? I think we may.

This part of the subject I shall for the present leave here, and passing over for a moment your intermediate remarks, I shall proceed at once to what you say on the subject of religion.

And here I cannot help observing that you appear to be as much of an enthusiast in your opposition to religion, as the most irrational devotee to religion is in its favour. I wish you to be particularly attentive to what I am now going to say, because such attention is necessary to do justice to my views on the subject. Know then that I neither now am, nor ever at any time of my life was, connected with any religious body; and that therefore my opinions on the subject of religion, have not been formed on religious party-views, nor sectarian principles. Perhaps it would be as well to be quite explicit here, and to state to you what it is, that in my view constitutes real religion. And this I feel to be the more necessary, because it is evident to me, that your views on the subject of religion, and mine are somewhat different. I will therefore in order to prevent any misunderstanding on this point, give you my definition of religion. *I look upon religion to be entirely an act of the mind: a feeling of homage and gratitude on the part of the creature to the creator.* This, to be short, combines the sum and substance of my views on the subject of religion. You do not appear to me, to make the proper distinction between religion, and the abuse of religion. Upon this principle you might oppose yourself to every thing good in the world; because there is nothing however good in itself, but what may be abused. And would you in order to remove the abuse, remove the thing itself? Surely you would not. You would rather endeavour to remove the abuse, and let the excellence remain.

I am as ready to admit as you are to insist upon the fact, that a

great deal of folly has arisen, and a great deal of mischief been committed in the name, and under the mask, of religion. This, however, ought not to be ascribed to religion itself. As well might you denounce the light of day, as well might you denounce the darkness of night, for all the mischiefs committed in the light or the dark, as denounce religion for the mischief practised in its name.

Real religion teaches nothing that is bad. "All religion," says one of your favourite authors, Mr. Paine, "is good that teaches mankind to be good, and I know of none that teaches mankind to be bad." Mr. Paine is right here. It is impossible that real religion, that feeling which worships the great creator for his goodness and benevolence towards his creatures, should not teach his creatures to practice goodness and benevolence towards each other, as the most acceptable offering they can make to the Deity. And here, Sir, it more particularly is, that religion promotes the cause of morality. That justice which the Deity shews to his creatures, he, by such shewing, teaches them to practice towards each other, that goodness which he displays to all, teaches them to practice it to each other; and that mercy which he withholds not from the very meanest of his creatures, teaches them to shew the same to each other.

You will have it that religion is the great political, as well as moral, enemy of mankind. Good government you declare to be incompatible with religious feeling.

Never, I believe, was there a grosser error fallen into. I will not take up your time, or my own, in shewing, by reasoning on the subject, that you are wrong. I will cite you a practical proof that you are in error. An example that must necessarily carry with it much more weight than the most plausible abstruse reasoning on the subject, unsupported by such example. The case that I refer to is the government of the United States of America. You declare a Republican government to be the best. A government essentially Republican, both in name, form, and spirit, exists in that country: and yet we are told by good authority, that there is not a more religious people on the face of the earth, than the inhabitants of the United States. Here then is a practical proof that you are wrong. For here is a government that is, according to your own definition, a good government, existing in, and conducted by, a very religious community. Here is demonstrative proof not only, that religious feeling and good government may, but that they actually do, exist together. I wish you not to suppose that I advocate the union of church and state establishments as they exist in this country. I do no such thing. I am aware that such union is hurtful both in a religious and political point of view. All I am here advocating is, that good government is not incompatible with religious feeling: and the case that I have cited sufficiently proves the correctness of this opinion.

You accuse me of writing more like a priest than a philosopher. I have told you before that I am not very anxious to bear the character of a learned philosopher, nor do I feel angry at being told that I write like a theologian. I believe that whether I write like a philo-

sopher; or a theologian, that my views on the matter are too well-founded to be overthrown by any efforts that can be made against them. I believe that what I have just said on the union of good government with religious feeling is founded on a true conception of the human character operated on as it is by the external objects we behold.

I have before made an allusion to your calling my questions ridiculous, and were it not that I do not wish to give you offence I should retort upon you and say that I do not think my questions to you are more ridiculous than are some of your questions to me. As it is I will merely say that I do not regard your question of "What is a spirit?" a very rational question. I do not think I am bound to answer any such question. I do not think that I can be fairly called upon to do any more than shew that the world could not make itself. That therefore it must have had a maker, which maker, whatever may be its particular nature, I call God. And this I have done as I imagine sufficiently both in my last, and a preceeding part of this, letter; and to ask me to define that not itself definable by human language, certainly appears to be bordering on the ridiculous. Do you mean to deny the existence of every thing not definable by human language? You might upon this rule deny the astronomical fact of the moon being inhabited because astronomers are not capable of defining to you the precise form and features of the inhabitants of that planet. Another question that you put is equally, if not more, irrational. You ask me "Why should we create a God." Had I ever contended that we ought to create a God? Or rather, on the contrary, had not I uniformly contended that God had created man, and not that man had created God. Your question appears not, to me, to have any rational bearing on the subject.

I will now call your attention to one part of my letter on which you have not touched at all; a part too, which I conceive to be very material. I mean that part of it in which I contend, in opposition to you, that the difference between man and other animals does not arise solely from the difference of physical organization; and instance the similarity of the physical organization of the ourang-outang and man and their great difference in point of intellect in support of my allegation. This is really a most important part of the subject, because if I contend the great difference between man and other animals does not arise from the difference of physical organization, it affords a strong presumption of the existence of the human soul, and an almost positive proof of the existence of a Deity; because, if the same physical organization of the brain does not give the same precise degree of intellect, it is evident, that some other power must contribute by design to give the additional portion of intellect: the idea of design necessarily includes that of a designer, which in this case is the Deity; and thus we are inevitably brought to the conviction of the existence of a God.

I will now dismiss this part of the subject, and make a few observations on what you say respecting the excellence of human nature and the

ease with which you suppose a great moral change could be brought about in the human mind.

When I read this part of your reply I could scarcely avoid smiling. You forcibly reminded me of the opinions I used to hold on the same subject some years back; a more extensive acquaintance and connection with the world, however, has completely cured me of that error, and happy will it be for you if the world does not give you experimental proof of your error. I take it to be impossible, so far to reform mankind by human means, as, to make them purely virtuous for the sake of virtue. I will engage one thing with you if you like; a thing, too, which you regard as impossible on my part to perform. I will engage to give you a definition of a spirit as soon as you have effected this great moral change in the human mind, at the same time I am ready to admit that there is a great deal of excellence in the human character; but it is also clear that this natural excellence is so powerfully balanced by vicious feeling that it is necessary to have recourse to another tie to overbalance the vicious feeling: that other tie is, as I observed in my former letter, religion, and that it does produce the effect of softening and refining the mind is a fact clearly established by history; a fact, however, that you in your answer do not appear at all disposed to acknowledge, you seem to think that religion is very hurtful in a moral point of view. Away with priests and religious institutions, say you, and we shall at once have an intelligent, a moral, a virtuous community; you appear to forget one thing, that whether mankind have existed from all eternity or not, that their existence must necessarily precede the existence of priests as a body, and religious institutions as such; and that therefore it was mankind who made priests and religious institutions, and not priests and religious institutions that made mankind what they are. You may here perhaps attempt to turn this into an argument against myself, and say how is it that human nature being so imperfect should be the work of a perfect being? Is it not a strong proof of the correctness of my doctrine? To which, if you do ask the question, I shall answer "not at all, it is a proof of nothing except of the weakness which the great creator, for wise purposes of his own, thought fit to attach to the human character, it proves nothing, except, that God being all-powerful, he could give just what degree of perfection he thought fit to his creatures, and that for reasons of his own, he thought fit to attach the degree of imperfection we see attached to the human character;" but as his reasons for this are completely beyond the reach of mortal research, it is not for us who are mortal to state those reasons, which from our very nature we are necessarily precluded from knowing.

You do attempt to turn one argument against me nearly in a similar manner to this supposed one, but not in my opinion with any great success. I mean that in which you do most freely agree with me in the great improvements which have taken place in the world, but assert that so far from its being a proof of the existence of a Deity, it is a proof of the contrary. For, say you, if there be a Deity

he would have made mankind perfect at first, and not have suffered them to attain this necessary degree of knowledge by such slow steps, and at such long intervals, as we see has been the case. Now in reply to this I have merely to say, what I have just said before, that God being the author of the human system, it was as he thought fit, and also that it was necessary for him so to form it, that it could keep advancing in knowledge as a mark to distinguish it from the brute system; for you know as well as I can tell you, that this circumstance of the continual improvement of the human mind is the great distinguishing mark between mankind and other animals; and from this fact I again draw the deduction (a rational one I think it is) of the existence of the human soul, and also of the existence of a Deity; for how could this continually improving state of the human mind be (every other part of animated nature remaining perfectly stationary) except from the operation of those qualities, which we suppose to be attached to the human soul; and how could these particular qualities have been given to man, giving him so decidedly and continually an improving superiority over every other class of animals, except by design on the part of a superior power? I know not exactly how you will answer this: perhaps you will at once deny its truth, or call it ridiculous and so dismiss it. You are aware however that the bare denial of a thing is no proof of the truth of that denial; you are also aware that the mere calling a thing ridiculous, is not a proof of its ridiculousness; this, therefore, will not avail you, neither will it avail you to give over again the creed of the Materialist by way of "contrast" as you call it. I shall shew you that it is essentially defective. I shall demonstrate to you, that, though it may account for a great many of the natural phenomena we behold, yet that it is fundamentally weak in assuming, as its foundation, a principle philosophically untrue, that of ascribing to one principle two contrary operations, viz. that of cause and effect being combined in one and the same, or it does not at all account for the phenomena we behold.

Now how widely different and, as I think, how much more rational than this, is the creed of the Theist and Religionist? He looks at matter as well as the Materialist, as he finds it, he observes its beautifully diversified operations and the harmony of the laws by which it is governed. He sees in all this the most evident marks of design acting *upon* matter; but he sees it not *in* matter. He sees no power *in* matter capable of *producing* matter, and he therefore concludes that a principle, not matter to our view, must have produced it. Thus far reason carries him, but reason does not enable him to discover the precise nature of this power, and he therefore wisely contents himself with the conviction of its existence without attempting the useless task of demonstrating precisely what it is. You will say perhaps, that this is not philosophical reasoning; for according to you none are philosophers, but what are Materialists. I could, if disposed, enumerate a pretty long list of names that the world has looked upon as being philosophers and who were not Materialists: this however I will not do, but will just

refer to an expression or two in your reply, which I do not think are very philosophical, or not much more so, than are my questions to you of which you complain so much. You say in one part of your reply: "I could mock your God as Elijah is represented in the Bible mocking the God Baal." This expression allow me to say, has much more of violent feeling in it, than the dignified and temperate language of philosophy. You also say: "I defy your God, and all the Gods and spirits that ever were in existence." This I imagine is not a very philosophical observation. It sounds more like the bravado of an enthusiast, than the cool reasoning of a philosopher.

I might here, I think, with propriety dismiss the subject for the present. I will however make a remark or two, on what you say respecting the consequences of not believing in the existence of a God. And here I wish you to believe that what I say arises from disinterested reflection, and not from any of that interested feeling which you so very liberally ascribe to priests. You appear to suppose that you are not morally responsible to God, because you do not believe in the existence of any such a being. Now what is the principle that this proposition involves? Why this, that if a man can reconcile his mind, to the commission of any offence, that he is morally justified in its commission, let it be ever so great. I wish you to understand that this is not at all meant as a personal allusion to yourself. I only do it to expose the principle which it involves.

Every highwayman; every criminal however notorious, is upon this rule of arguing justified, provided he has so far hardened his feeling as to believe that he has a right to prey upon society in the commission of his offences, even "the Society for the presecution of Vice," as it styles itself, is justified in its prosecution of you if the members of that society believe themselves to be justified in so doing; and it is very probable that they do, since from their education and their habits of thinking they must have formed notions quite in opposition to yours. And yet are they justified? I have before told you, that I do not think they are; and I am sure you will not say they are.

You say that as a father, a husband, and a member of society you have duties to perform; you have so, and I will give you credit for the due performance of the duties thus imposed upon you in these different capacities. But provided you could so far harden your feelings as not to have repugnance at being a harsh and severe parent, a bad husband, and a bad member of society, do you believe you would be morally justified in so being? By no means; you know that you would not be justified. Neither then will you be regarded as being justified, in opposing yourself to the settled opinion of mankind as to the existence of a Deity. Especially, as those opinions (I do not say they have produced any immoral effect upon your own mind) are so seemingly at variance with the moral habits of society.

I, however, as an individual member of the community, do not wish

to see this principle pushed too far. I do not want to see any man act the inquisitor over the human mind. I am conscious how difficult, and at sometimes how impossible it is, to controul our thoughts, and therefore I certainly do not wish any severity arising from this to be practised. All that I argue for is, that the mere belief of a thing is not in all cases a justification for acting upon that belief; it may be so generally, but not uniformly; and the instances that I have cited, I think sufficiently prove it. As to your talk about Mahomet and about the Gods of the Pantheon, I conceive it has nothing at all to do with the question. You might by this suppose that I meant to support all the ribaldry and nonsense ever believed and practised under the name of religion: what I have before said must I think sufficiently prove however that this is not the case; and with this remark, which I regard as being quite enough on this head I dismiss this part of your reply.

I will now just advert before I conclude to what you say in the beginning of your reply, respecting my not having read many works "in defence of what is called Atheism." Here you are right. I have not read many writings either for or against "what is called Atheism." And the reason of this is, I have always considered the proofs of the existence of a Deity, so abundantly manifest in the creation, and the absolute impossibility of any system of Atheism, having any rational basis on which to rest, being so great, that I really have read very little on either side of the question; but I can truly say, that the little I have read on the subject, as far as it has produced any effect at all on my mind, has much more fully tended to confirm my preconceived opinions on the existence of the Deity than the contrary.

And now, Sir, in conclusion, I take the liberty of again saying, (and whatever you may think about it, I can very truly assure you, that it is not dictated by any *priest-ridden* opinions) that I regard you as being engaged in a completely hopeless task. I believe you could as soon stop the diurnal revolution of the earth, stay the motion of the moon, or pull the sun from its centre, or perform any other great natural impossibility, as convince the great bulk of mankind of the truth or reasonableness of your theological doctrine. Look at all nations in all ages of the world, and you will find that however they may have differed with respect to creeds and systems, they have all been agreed in one point: viz. the acknowledgement of a great superior power as the object of their fear or their worship. However their different systems may have been enveloped in error or diffigured by superstition, still in this one point they have been uniformly agreed. From this general conformity of opinion in this respect, in both ancient and modern times, and seeing the little success that has attended the occasional efforts that have been made against it, I feel satisfied that it is an idea perfectly natural to the mind. So much so indeed, that, though not so necessary to the natural existence of man, as his food and clothing, yet he could almost as soon throw aside the one as the other. You may call to your

aid all the writings on that side of the question that you can come at; you may enforce your opinions with the greatest vigour of mind; you may in this task display the greatest talent: still every attack will produce no more effect on mankind at large, than would the force of a feather: not so much for want of ability in you (which I do not question) but because the doctrine itself is so much in opposition to the natural feeling of men that it can never make progress amongst them. This perhaps you may not believe. You may think differently; and be determined to persevere. This you may do; and the end of it I am persuaded will be, that whether you maintain or give up your present opinions as to the non-existence of a Deity, you will be convinced of the absolute impossibility of bringing the great bulk of mankind to entertain opinions, so seemingly contrary to the natural bias of their minds; and that if the Government and its officious supporters would be wise enough to let you alone, your writings would without producing any general effect whatever, soon pass away "to the tomb of all the capulets."

With a wish that persecution may cease, I subscribe myself with all due respect,

WILLIAM FITTON.

TO MR. WILLIAM FITTON, OF ROYTON,
LANCASHIRE.

SIR, Dorchester Gaol, June 18, 1823.

A CONFESSION of your holding erroneous tenets upon the subject, which you call *Deity*, it appears, is what I must not expect: for you confess, that a search after truth is not so much your notion of right, as to fall in with the strongest current of opinion. I am a very different kind of man. I seek to obtain all the knowledge I can; and whilst thus employed, I hold the opinions of every other human being as of no value: MY OWN ARE TO MYSELF EVERY THING. I hold no other man's opinion, whatever be his name, but as soon as I find what another man has written or spoken corresponds with my notions of right, I make it my opinion, and do not say, I hold another man's opinion. In reading I seldom make a note, and I read twenty times, or I may say a hundred times, so much more than I write. I do not read so much to find out what this man has written, or what that man has written, as to try all my own opinions upon it. Where I meet a subject that clashes with my ideas of right, I stop until I have given my own a full and fair trial; and

No. 26. Vol. VII.

if they prove not to be so well founded as those I read, I throw up the old ones and call the new ones mine. I do not read for the purpose of being able to give a long account of the writings of different persons; but I read, and write, and think, for one sole purpose—to form the most correct, and most powerful mind of my own, that my circumstances and capacities render possible. Nor will I allow that such a line of conduct is to arrogate a superiority over other men; for I do not conceal a single opinion that I hold: as fast as they come up I throw them out for others to scout or to benefit by them, according to their merits and powers: and this is what I call *free discussion*.

The common notion of the respect due to opinions is, that they are to be treated like the persons who bear them. You may admire their embellishments and praise the superiority of different parts; but the moment you point out a defect you kindle a deadly hatred. This is not my notion of right. Whilst I would not allow one single defect of the human body to be made a matter of offensive observation, I demand the common right to make what ever observations upon the opinions of others my own opinions may dictate; upon the principle that opinions are mere sounds and shadows, and not a property in which a man can be said to be injured. The public good demands this sacrifice.

It would not wound me to see every sentence I write subject to the most severe sarcasm, satire, scurrility, criticism, irony, and ridicule, or even vilifying: and why? Because, under my maxim for improvement, no one would derive more benefit from the opposition than myself. Though I have been long imprisoned for attacking the opinions of others, if opinions they can be called which a man is ashamed to defend or to throw up, I hold all opinions to be matters of no permanent social value; for I can contemplate the probability of a further human improvement, that shall view every existing opinion to be as erroneous, as we now view the doctrine of witchcraft and the justice of trial by ordeal. This is a necessary preface to much that I shall say to you in this rejoinder.

The matter of misunderstanding between you and me is the word *Deity*. We both agree that every effect has a cause, we travel in fellowship to a first cause; but here we disagree, because we cannot tell each other what this *First Cause* defines. Rather than quarrel, because we are both ignorant of the matter in dispute, would it not be better

for us not to talk about that which we do not understand, and turn our attentions to improvement upon points that we do understand? You will answer: "Why to be sure there is some reason in this question: but then you attack the settled convictions of mankind!" I do so: and why so? Because those *convictions* (allowing *false notions* such a name) have no *foundation* but that *very ignorance* which you and I display when we come to talk about a *first cause*. And this is not all: the want of foundation is the lesser evil. Upon those *convictions*, or *false notions*, which we see have their foundations in ignorance, a means is generated to make industry subservient to the purposes of idleness: a priestcraft is established, and the moral, inoffensive man is the object plundered. This is the cause why I attack the settled convictions of mankind.

The ignorance of mankind is a great evil in itself, but when imposition is heaped upon it, the duty of him who sees it is plain; he is morally bound to expose and oppose the fraud, and the only effectual way of doing this is, *not to fear to disturb that ignorance upon which that imposition has its foundation*. I should care but little about the settled convictions which you wish to preserve, if I saw no evil result from them; but I do see a great evil result from them; and it is *that evil*, and *not the convictions alone*, that I wish to overthrow.

History shews, and experience proves, that no possible extent of knowledge can injure the condition of mankind; but on the other hand, even you admit, that their condition is improved in the same ratio in which their knowledge is increased. It is an indisputable axiom, that knowledge is power, that knowledge is prosperity, and that knowledge is happiness. The happiness of ignorance is nothing more than the content of any other well-fed animal: the passions are allayed but there is no mental happiness. It is, therefore, as clear to me, as the noon-day sun, which I now behold, and whose genial influence I feel, that its rays would be no more visible through a dense and hazy atmosphere, than sound knowledge would be visible to a credulous and superstitious mind. The very absence of all credulity and superstition is essential to the possession of the first principles of sound knowledge; for you must begin to reason only from what you know to be correct, to make a correct advancement.

But, perhaps you will not be satisfied with my settling your question about *Deity* in this manner. You are not

content that I shall drop the subject, because you candidly acknowledge a complete ignorance upon it; but strange to say, because you and others talk about it, and fancy, that you have settled convictions upon the matter, and because I impeach such pretences to conviction, you call upon me to disprove the existence of a certain supposition, which I know nothing at all about, and which you cannot describe to me! Tell me what I am to disprove? Whatever has an existence known to any man, can be described; but to ask me to describe to you the objects of your credulity, about which you have no comprehension, is something more than a ridiculous request. Now the plain matter of fact is, that *your first cause* and *my first cause* is one, and the same thing. Every man who can reason has the same notion about a *first cause*; but no man can, no man will be ever able to describe it. You quarrel with me because I will not adopt certain actions which you consider a necessary homage to this first cause. If I knew the cause, I could judge of the homage due to it; but as I know nothing of the cause, I cannot be arrogant enough to presume to know, by dictating to myself or to any other human being, what homage is required. The homage of morality I am very willing to pay it; because, I can see that it is a homage which will benefit and not injure any other object about me; but I rather suspect, that the homage which you would exact, is an *expensive homage, a continuation of that system which constitutes religion, a trade for idle men to profit by, and by which the industrious are taxed and the poor kept poor*. If you will only renounce all view of this kind, your sentiments and mine will be in immediate harmony: and after giving a man a good education in morals and physics, we may safely leave him to think what he pleases about this *great first cause*. It was a grand observation by Lord Shaftesbury, when asked by his Lady what was the religion of wise men; he answered, *that wise men had no religion at all, nor did they talk about it*. To this saying I heartily assent. Religion is a game at which none but rogues and fools will play. An established religion defines two things—the *dupers* and the *duped*. Wise men stand aloof and laugh or lament as the folly or the evil impels them.

You have now explained, that what you meant by the *life of matter* is *animal life*; and wonder why I could not see it to have been your meaning. But, happening to be one of those who do not attach any very great importance to animal life, nor even to the whole of animated nature, and hav-

ing been much in the habit, of late, of contemplating vegetable life, and mineral life, as well as animal life; it is not altogether strange that I should ask which was meant. When I speak of matter, I include all that I can comprehend; and it was necessary for me to understand, whether you had the same meaning when you spoke of the *life of matter*. We should never differ if we could explain to each other the right ideas we attach to the words we use. If a dictionary of our language could be made so perfect, as that no one could dissent from its definitions, there would be an end to all idle literary controversy. All our disputes will not alter any one physical arrangement in matter; therefore, it is evident, that we dispute because we do not apply the same meanings to the same words.

Life, in an animal sense, I define as a sensation. Life, in a general sense, I think may be defined as a circulation of fluids in, and throughout, all the pores and organizations of solids. It applies strictly to both animals and vegetables, and seems to be a common principle of all that we know of the universe. According to a late alleged discovery of Dr. Brewster's, it applies to minerals, as well as to animals and vegetables, for, by the aid of the microscope, he has seen, that the smallest brilliant has its cavities and aqueous fluids, just like the largest rock; proving, in this instance, that the principle of life or existence, is the same, in the most minute, and on the most extensive scale: the same in the grain of sand as in the largest chain of mountains or rocks or even the whole earth: the same in the smallest blade of grass as in the oak tree; the same in the mite that hops in the cheese, as in the man, the elephant, or the mammoth!

The atmosphere is pregnant with animal life: the surface of the earth is covered with animal and vegetable life, wherever there is a sufficient degree of heat: all the waters form but one mass of animal life: every hair that grows on our bodies is a rope of living insects: in short, I see nothing but life in every thing, and everywhere; therefore, it was no matter of surprise, according to your own answer, that I should ask you what you meant by the *life of matter*. Seeing nothing but life now, I conclude, that wherever a similar degree of heat has operated upon similar materials, similar animal and vegetable life has always existed. In fact I do not see why frozen liquids of all kinds may not be termed mineral life. They hold an existing principle

upon a certain tenure, and then change and pass to some other kind of life.

If you will attempt to calculate upon eternity, and only ask yourself, what *your first cause, your great designer* was about, before he made, what you call the world, perhaps, you will be able to give yourself an answer, as to all particulars of the past. I am very careful how I predict of the future, or presume of the past: the present is where my thoughts are generally employed.

I agree to all you say about chemistry; but I do not agree with you, when you infer from my observations, that matter is a producing or increasing power. We perfectly understand what is meant by solid and fluid matter; and though you may increase the one by the other, you cannot increase both at the same time. The change from one to the other accounts for every mode and diversity we behold. Animals I look upon as a fungus springing out of the hot bed of change and corruption which exists on the whole surface of the earth: just as Ferguson, the Astronomer, has described the whole atmosphere round the earth to be a *mossy or fungus concretion or exhalation*. I forget the particular simile which he applies to it; but his meaning is exactly that which I express. Taking this view of what you call *life*, you will see exactly the ground upon which I renounce all ideas of souls and spirits, or *spiritual matters*.

The next subject to be discussed is, what you call, and I call, the human mind. I speak with this precision, because, I know a man, who rejects the word *mind* altogether, in its common acceptation; and the word *nature*. I believe, that both words are *indefensible* upon the principles attached to them in common conversation. In speaking of mind, you say: "here then is a human principle not matter, controuling and directing the operations of matter". Wonderful discovery!

I do not hold that every man is bound to read what I write and publish; I grant that every man should please himself about it; but the man who attempts to answer me ought to know what I have written, if he intends to discuss any general subject. For these two years past, I have published again and again, my opinion, that the mind of man is as material as his body. I was not the first to do this. Mr. Lawrence, in his celebrated Lectures on Physiology, has treated the subject scientifically. Many other men of science have written on the same subject, to the same purpose. Under the term *phre-*

nology, which signifies the *doctrine*, or *science of the mind*, the subject is become quite a prevailing topic for discussion.

The system of the nervous organization, as taught by Drs. Gall and Spurzheim, is entirely founded upon the principle, that *the mind is material*. The system traces the prevalence of different principles in different men to a prevalence of a specific organ in the brain. In short, I do not find any one in the present day, but yourself and the priests, attempting to contend for the immateriality of the mind. Now, Sir, let us attempt an enquiry into what constitutes the human mind, as we call our talking and thinking faculty.

This faculty of the human body has its foundation in the animal sensations, and exists to a certain degree in every animal. The more fine and more numerous the sensations, the greater the amount of mind. It is thus, the mind is improved by study, and different acquirements attained by the powers of repeated applications. So also may it be seen, how it is, that one person will imitate or attain an object on the first application, which another will be obliged to repeat again and again to obtain a proficiency.

Mind is a compound of sensations. Sensation is an impression and an impulse made by external objects on the nerves and their fluids, a trace of which is immediately imprinted upon the brain, and institutes recollection or memory. The internal wants, the sounds and actions of the body are also capable of making similar impressions, and of giving similar impulses to the nerves, always working to mutual aid and support. The brain may be supposed to be the roots of the nerves and the latter the branches. The medium of sensation, or of conveying sensations, to and from the brain, is a fluid which pervades and circulates through those branches, as subtle as that which is called the electric fluid: in fact, the whole nervous system is worked upon electrical principles. Thus we find excitement produces anger, joy, sorrow, pleasure, pain, crying, laughing, grief, sympathy, love, hatred, revenge, and other passions and sensations, entirely upon electrical principles; and all the sensations are produced in a ratio with the exciting power, allowing for a difference in the materials worked upon; for we all know, that there is a wide difference in our different sensations, and a striking difference in the male and female on that head. Now it follows from this knowledge, that the mind is wholly material; for the mind is a compound of all these sensations and is

improved and increased by action, by exercise, by strengthening the moral powers, and by controuling the immoral powers. The medium of sensation is material, and every exciting power is material; so I leave you, Mr. Fitton, to search for the immateriality, to search for—nothing!—Before you talk any more about immateriality, I advise you to study the nature of the subtle fluids into which nearly all kinds of matter may be passed and dispersed: you will then learn that your immateriality is nothing more than a material, though a subtle fluid, that escapes the vision of the common eye, but not the mental eye, of him who looks after it. Here again you may see that we shall agree as soon as we can rightly understand the meaning of each other's words.

Imagination, or invention, is the most difficult part of the thinking faculty to be accounted for, and I can only say, that it is a faculty that grows out of our different sensations. It is a raising up in the mind of unseen images. For instance, we can imagine an absent friend to be ill or dead when he is not so. Now, I would account for the origin of this imagination; first, as a memory of what constituted illness or death, and then an action of fear, and sympathy, and regard for that friend upon that part of our memory. If we had never received sensations of illness or death, we could not create the imagination—in view; for then, there would be no excitement upon the sensations of fear, sympathy, love, &c. for that friend. This is a deep subject, and may be entered into with a lengthened detail and a multitude of shewings and comparisons; but it will suit me better to do that twenty years hence, if I live so long, than at present. I am but a novice at every thing; and feel, that I want experience to illustrate my subjects well. I stand in need of a more extensive opportunity to make observations upon men and manners, and to improve by experimental knowledge. However, my subject here is to shew you the materiality of the mind, which I hope I have fairly done.

Imagination as to Deity, I consider may be thus accounted for. As soon as human beings began to talk and think, they found themselves surrounded by circumstances which occasioned them pain and pleasure. Seeking for causes to every effect, they attributed their pleasures to the agency of some good being, and their pains to the agency of some evil being. The fancied causes being invisible to their minds, they raised up similies of some invisible powers, whose modes of action must be similar to their own, and

talked of those beings as we now talk of spirits. This I take to have been precisely the ground upon which the imaginations of gods, devils, spirits, ghosts, apparitions, hobgoblins, fairies, sprites, and the whole spiritual tribe had their foundations. No spiritualist has ever been content with one God and one devil, with one good and one evil spirit: his fancy has always created them in hosts and legions. The Persians, who professed to believe in the existence of one good and evil spirit of equal power, had a multitude of subordinate ones as genii. The thirty thousand good and evil gods of the Pagans had exact the same foundation. The God, devil, and good and bad angels of the Christians and Mohometans have no better foundation. The principle of imagination is the same throughout, in the Hindoo, the Persian, the Pagan generally, and the Jew, Christian, and Mahometan. Each of these fancies his own imaginations superior to those of all others, and that he alone has a right notion of the spiritual world! whilst, I can see that, in the scale of intellect, they are all alike; no one of them superior to the other; but all wrong! Their imaginations are all ill-founded, and will bear no kind of test.

Man's power of speech has its first principle in the capacity of uttering peculiar sounds: his sensations reduce those sounds to signs, and generate what we call speech. This power of speech is evidently subject to all the sensations, and acts in strict accordance, being set in motion by them.

A strong mind with a feeble body may be easily accounted for. The three departments of the body, in which the strength lies, may be considered the bones, the muscles, and the nerves; but allowing that every part has some degree of dependence upon every other part, we may say, that strength mainly depends upon the muscles. A man's nervous department may be sufficiently strong to form strong sensations and a strong mind, and yet he may be very weak in the muscular or bony departments. Alexander Pope, the Poet, I take to have been an instance of this kind. If you can shew me, after this shewing to you, that the mind survives the sensations of the body, I will say you are a clever man: excepting the impressions it has made on external objects.

I do not mean to offer you the least offensive word. My object is mutual improvement. I acknowledge that you

are an intelligent man considering education, situation, and other things: and I readily acknowledge, that you have a capacity that may yet rank you among the most intelligent: but you are far behind in your knowledge of the prevailing topics now undergoing discussion. Dismiss all your prejudices against words and persons; stand forth the unsuspected advocate of free and fair discussion; and you will be sure to end in doing that which is right and good. I am thus admonitory, because, since our last correspondence, I have been informed that you have been more active in *condemning than in examining* my publications, principles and motives.

You call upon me to distinguish between the *use* and *abuse* of religion. In the word *religion* I see nothing but *abuse*. I can see no kind of *use* in it. I have written as a motto for the 7th Vol. of "The Republican," the following sentence: "A moral man is all that a man ought to be." If you can shew to me that there is any one duty required of man which morality does not embrace, then you will have made one step towards the shewing of a utility in what you call religion. I consider, that morality embraces every human duty, and, that if mankind would but take one half of the pains to be *moral* which they take to be considered *religious*, they would live and die much happier than they do at present.

I will again make a sort of concession to meet your ideas, or to have a right explanation of words. As far as Christianity defines any thing moral, I am a Christian. As far as the word *religion* defines any thing moral, I wish to be *religious*. As far as any kind of sectarianism adds any thing to morality, I wish to be considered as belonging to that sect. If you are of the same disposition, I shall leave you nothing to say in answer to this letter. Make use of no words that you cannot define, and then you will find the foundation of unanimity. All the literary quarrels of mankind have their foundations in a wrong conception of words; or a use of wrong words to convey their ideas. If we could agree about words as we can agree about colours, we should never disagree. The imagination has created words without being able to define them, or to find a meaning or application for them; but the imagination cannot create colours; therefore, on that head, it cannot create disagreement. A putting down of religion, I consider to be nothing more than a putting down of false imaginations; therefore, I smile when

you hold it up to my view as a thing of the greatest physical power; a thing so far superhuman as the planetary motions! I have no vaunting and valorous notions about putting down all the religious notions of mankind. Knowing, that such publications as mine can only operate where they are read, and carefully and candidly examined, I know, that it will be a work of ages to uproot the false imaginations of mankind. I have no *Quixotic* or *chivalric* notions upon this head; no superhuman pretensions; my actions all centre upon one pivot. Knowing that life is an evanescent, short and passing thing; knowing that there are such principles as good and evil affecting the sensations of that life, I feel a desire to increase the amount of good, *first to myself and family*, and next to all mankind. Such is my idea of duty and right: such is my morality: such is my religion!

Touching what you say about the mixture of religion and good Government in the United States of America, and upon which you seem to write with a confidence of silencing all answer to the objection, that religion is incompatible with good Government; I have to observe, that, in the United States, I am not aware that any species of compulsory taxation exists for the support of religion. It is against this principle that I mainly contend. The opinions of mankind would not be a matter deserving of much notice, if they were not used to individual and general injury, or for the purposes of oppression and persecution.

I have never been one to boast much of the purity of the Government of the United States: as far as I have been able to gain information, I have heard of a great deal of impurity in it; and I have heard, that much of this is attributable to the religion, the hypocrisy, and the general ignorance of the people.

I do not look at the Government of the United States, as being strictly a Republican Government; it is more like a *cheap monarchy*, or an imitation of the form without the expences of the British Government. I do not hear that the people choose all their own magistrates; which is essential, and the main point in a Republican Government; but I hear something of commissions and offices being bought and sold corruptly! I hear of many of the faults and tricks there, which are common with our pretty Government at home. The fact is, that religion has every thing to do with the preservation of such a Government as now exists in this country; but, if we could reform the Government upon a prin-

ciple of every man being an equal elector, and every officer subject to an election upon that basis, religion would lose its political power; because, the majority would never elect and continue a legislation and a magistracy to their own injury. Religion amalgamates with, and supports, every thing that is corrupt, and thus is the very reverse of morality, which improves every thing with which it amalgamates.

The Government of the United States has never yet had the spirit and independence to form a criminal and civil code of its own; but has contented itself with engrafting a few wholesome laws upon the old corrupt and foul code of this country.

You charge me with declaring that "good Government is incompatible with religious feeling:" I will not be positive, but I think, it will be a hard task for you to find such an expression under my hand writing. There is a wide difference between religious feeling, and a religion established by law, supported by compulsory taxation, and upon which all criticism, or against which all opposition is penally forbidden. The main difference between this country and the United States, on the subject of religion, is, that what exists there is really religious feeling, making no pretensions to political influences: and what exists here, is more a pretension to political influence than to religious feeling.

I will make another concession on this subject, and lay it down as a correct principle, that religion to be good, to be the pure act of a contemplative and grateful mind, must be confined to the reflections and actions of that mind, and not shew itself in sounds, nor in bodily actions. The moment it is even talked about, it descends to be an affair between man and man, and not between man and the creator he professes to adore. It becomes a matter of vanity and hypocrisy, and not of humble and depending gratitude for life, for happiness, or for benefits received. After all that has been said about my *irreligion* and my *shocking blasphemies*, I doubt whether *a more really religious man than myself ever lived!* Reminding you again, that all our misunderstandings relate to words and not to things known and visible.

You ask me, in one part of your reply, if I mean to deny the existence of every thing not definable by human language." I rejoin, that I do not wish to deny any existence; I only ask to be allowed the liberty of not acknowledging those which are not known beyond human imagination: that thing which I have described to you to be so fickle, so fan-

ciful, so irrational. The difference between rationality and irrationality is, that the former trusteth nothing to the imagination; the latter every thing. We are not justified to talk about any thing that is not definable by human language: if we do so talk, we talk of words and not of things. Bring your mind to the use of no words of whose physical relations you are ignorant, or cannot define; and then you will get upon the right ground for unanimity, for good sense, for sound knowledge, and for rapid improvement. Your time and attention will then be solely occupied in gathering sound and useful knowledge, and not in making idle sounds, and in creating idle fancies and foolish imaginations. Perhaps you will hardly believe me, when I tell you, that I have acquired that degree of mental power, or self-controul, as never to suffer an ill-founded or unpleasant imagination to rise and disturb me: to create no phantoms by my own fancy, nor to suffer those to disturb me which are created by others. It was under this state of mind that I asked you, "Why should we create a God?" And it is possible, that you may yet discover the question not to be irrational. I smiled again and again over the question, after I had written it, as I knew well it would strike hard upon your nerves, upon your sensations, upon your sentient principle, upon your material mind. The word God is altogether an idle word; and, as I endeavour to discriminate between what are and what are not idle words, I could tease you with a play upon such words as a cat teases a mouse, without falling into an error of expression on my own part, or without giving you any thing more than a well-barbed hook to bait upon and no chance of escape. Pardon this boast: the object is good: it is to stimulate you and others to be careful as to what words you use.

I did not overlook, nor jump over what you said about the *ouran-outang*, in your first letter. I knew the subject so positively, and saw that you did not know it, that I rather spared you than feared you there. I thought, that as I had sent a great many copies of Lawrence's Lectures into your neighbourhood, you would not have found it necessary to recal my attention to that point. You again lay great stress upon it, so hear, in a few words, what Mr. Lawrence says: "Two large membraneous bags cover the front of the neck under the skin, and open into the larynx between the os hyoides and thyroid cartilage; a structure which spoils him for speaking." There, Sir, that settles the question. *Man*

was a mere *ouran-outang* before he began to speak and to form a language. Recollect, that the uttering of sounds and the reducing of those sounds to signs makes what you call the soul or mind. The *ouran-outang* cannot utter similar sounds, nor make similar signs; or, perhaps, he would be a better man than some of us who can! I apprehend, that there are many animals who have a sufficient brain to form one of your souls, if they could only bring it into action by similar sounds, similar signs, and similar hands. The beaver gives us a pretty good proof of what sort of a soul he would exhibit if he had the same capacity to form a language and to institute a self-defence.

You complain of the prudence of my asking you to define, "What is a spirit?" It astonishes you that I should put such a question, when I know your incapacity to define it. But, Sir, you use the word, as if it were the sign of a known existence; you quarrel with me because I will not acknowledge it to be the sign of any existence; and when I tell you, that I know nothing about it, and whilst you tell me, that you know nothing about it, you urge the necessity of my proving or disproving it negatively! We must ask a third person to decide this matter between us, or a jury of persons. I use no words with you, which I say I cannot define; excepting the *first cause*. And even there I make an *attempt* towards definition.

As to what is said about design in your letter, and in a letter from a friend, in a late number of "The Republican," signed I. G., I would observe, that the existing adaptation of a means to an end, in all matters superhuman, is no proof that the means were designed to that end; but only a proof that the means once organized apply themselves to those ends. For instance, it is said of the hare, that it is furnished with the organs of swiftness to flee from, and an ocular capacity to keep its eyes upon its pursuers, whilst fleeing. What does this prove with regard to a designer? If design is proved in furnishing those qualities to the hare, has not that same *great designer* designed, that the hare should be hunted by the hounds and that human beast of prey—the human hunter? Does it not prove, that if it is right in the hare to flee for self-preservation, or from destruction, it is also right in the hounds, or the hunter, to destroy and devour if they can catch? The human being has the same propensity to flee as the hare, when it feels that its destruction is decreed by a superior power. The hound that pursues the hare would in

its turn flee from a superior destroying power, the moment it had a sense of danger. Every word that you, or any other person, can say about superhuman design, may be thus turned into an argument against you. The plain fact and inference is this, that all animal life has a tenacity or a desire to continue its existence, being the only thing conscious of existence, but, with all its desires, we can see that it is in all cases transitory; and this tenacity or desire to live is an impulse, that applies all its means and powers to that end, or to their several ends, upon that universal animal principle of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain to self; or upon the moral principle of aiding others to that end.

Where you speak of its being an astronomical fact, that the moon is inhabited; you must be told, that you go farther than you can prove. It is not an astronomical fact; but it is yet a question, whether or not the surface of the moon exhibits similar animal productions with the earth, or any kind of animal productions.

Where you dispute the sufficiency of human responsibility and say, that upon this ground, the members of the Vice Society may assert their justification in persecuting me, you are again fundamentally wrong. They proceed upon the same principle as you argue upon; they think too much of an imaginary responsibility, that is, not moral, and too little of all human and moral responsibility. They do me an injury without being able to shew a *just, or even a moral, cause* for it. They do me an injury without procuring or continuing to themselves, or to the community, the slightest benefit in return. They positively pursue my injury without gaining the slightest object, beyond that of personal and individual revenge!

No man believes that he has a right to do wrong; shew him first that he is doing wrong, and then if he will not desist, put a restraint upon him. A moral responsibility is a thousand times more powerful than any idea of superhuman responsibility. Where a wrong is known to be done, every moral sensation rises up in judgment against it. I repeat, that the man who seeks after, or thinks about, superhuman or religious responsibility, is too apt to lose sight of, and neglect, that which is moral and human. The first principle of my persecutors is to refuse to hold any kind of argument with me; and here it is that they are wicked. They feel power, and exercise it without considering whether it be a moral power and usefully applied.

I believe that I have now scarcely left a point untouched in your reply, and if you can refute what you find here, you will both please and oblige,

Yours, &c.

R. CARLILE.

A CARICATURE.

THE character of Englishmen may be displayed by three men mounting a ladder. The first mounts very slow and stately, discharging all his filthy evacuations upon the two below him. The second follows close, eagerly endeavouring to catch all that falls from the first, while he is vehemently kicking against the third to kick him off the ladder, and threatening to break his neck if he attempts to mount a stave higher. The first may say to the second, "Ah! you filthy knave! because I am a few steps above you you will lick my dirt; but if I was as much below you, you would break my neck." The second may answer, "Ah! your Majesty! I don't lick your dirt from any motive of respect, but only from interest or fear; but if that rascal, Workman, attempts to follow me, I will kick him off the ladder and break his neck." The third may properly say, "Ah! you villains! you want me to support the ladder whilst you mount and threaten to break my neck if I get on a stave; but I'll upset it, then we shall all be on even ground; and I'll take care never more to labour to raise a ladder for exclusive privilege to mount upon!"